

## **The Pornography Trap**

### **By David Feddes**

What is a man looking for when he watches an adults-only movie channel? What is a man looking for when he clicks an X-rated website on his computer? What is a man looking for when he stares into *Playboy* and other girlie magazines? What is a man looking for when he walks into a strip joint? What is a man looking for when he goes to a place of prostitution? He is looking for God.

You might think, “That’s crazy. God is the last thing guys are looking for when they get into pornography. They’re looking for naked bodies to turn them on. If they were looking for God, they would pray or read the Bible or go to church. If they watch pornography or nude dancers or hire prostitutes, they’re not looking for God; they’re looking for sexual thrills.” At one level, that’s right, of course. When men get into pornography, they don’t consciously search for God there. But still I think G. K. Chesterton was right when he said, “Every man who knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God.” That’s not what the man is consciously thinking at the time—but that’s what he’s really doing. He is looking to fill a huge craving, an irresistible urge. He may think that this urge is simply sexual desire, but it’s not. He’s looking for God.

Pornography is just a trap set by Satan to ensnare those who are looking for God. It’s not the only kind of trap Satan uses, but it’s one of the most effective. Thanks to modern technology, it only takes the click of a remote control or a computer mouse to snap Satan’s trap shut on yourself. Once you step into the pornography trap and it clamps down on you, it is difficult—almost impossible—to pull free.

But if you realize that you’re caught in a deadly trap and if you want to be free, there is hope. And if you recognize your real craving and seek satisfaction in God instead of in pornography, the jaws of the trap weaken their grip. With God’s help, you can pull out of the trap and move on toward what you hungered for all along: the thrill and satisfaction of God. As you gain freedom and get to know God, you must stay alert to your own weaknesses and be wary of bait that Satan will use in other traps, but you can be confident that God can satisfy you and keep you free from slavery to shameful, deadly habits. The Bible says, “Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Galatians 5:16).

### **Craving Eternity**

But maybe I’m getting ahead of myself. What I’ve just said may sound unrealistic. For Christians and non-Christians alike, the message may ring hollow that when a man looks at pornography he is looking for God, and that God can break the grip of pornography. If you’re a non-Christian, you might insist that you’re not looking for God at all and you just enjoy the sexual charge that you get from pornography. If you’re a Christian, you might tell me that your faith in Christ hasn’t helped much in dealing with the power of pornography. You know it’s wrong and feel ashamed about it, but you can’t resist it. You believe in Jesus and want to do right, but when you’re put to the test, the pull of pornography seems stronger than God’s hold on you.

To understand why pornography is so addictive, we might point to the power of the sex drive and to the way men are visually oriented and are more likely than women to be turned on by what they see. That’s true as far as it goes, but it doesn’t account for why pornography is so addictive. There’s a drive even stronger and deeper than sex,

the drive to fill the hole in your soul. Entrapment in pornography happens when your wires get crossed inside and the craving for God gets mixed up with the craving for sexual stimulation.

Each of us is designed for a love relationship with God. We're made in such a way that we can be fully satisfied only by connecting with the Lord and by savoring a joy that is out of this world. The Bible says that God has "set eternity in the hearts of men" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). This built-in craving for the eternal is so powerful that if we try to satisfy it with anything but God, we will be trapped, enslaved, and addicted by that thing. Whether it's pornography or alcohol or food or sports or achievement or something else, if we try to fill our God-craving with a non-God object, we get hooked.

When you lock your eyes on a sex scene, you are really looking for God and for an adventurous, eternal relationship with him. But you're looking in the wrong place. All sin, including use of pornography, is a matter of not being satisfied in God and looking for satisfaction outside of God and outside of his way. The built-in desire for God is so strong that if it latches onto something less than God, it becomes slavery and addiction to that thing. Jesus said, "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). People without any relationship to God can be trapped by pornography, and so can some Christians who have real faith and have tasted something of God's grace but still have misdirected desires. To be free of the pornography trap, they need to find fuller satisfaction in God.

### **Pursuing Manhood**

Related to the hunger for God is another deep and basic craving a man has: to pursue his dreams and prove his manhood. What does this involve? Author John Eldredge says, "In the heart of every man is a desperate desire for a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue." This is no accident; it's part of the way God has put us together. The male heart wants to prove its strength against some obstacle, do something daring and exciting, and be a hero to a woman and win her admiration and love.

Many men give up on their boyhood dreams and live boring, unsatisfying lives. We don't believe we could ever meet a great challenge, pursue an exciting adventure, or be a hero to a very special woman. We may already have a special woman, a wife living in the same house and sleeping in the same bed, but we might not see her beauty or believe we have what it takes truly to win her heart and her admiration—so we don't even try. What happens then? In his book *Wild at Heart*, John Eldredge writes,

If a man does not find those things for which his heart is made, if he is never even invited to live for them in his deep heart, he will look for them in some other way. Why is pornography the number one snare for men? He longs for the beauty, but without his fierce and passionate heart he cannot find her or win or keep her. Though he is powerfully drawn to the woman, he does not know how to fight for her or even that he *is* to fight for her. Rather, he finds her mostly a mystery that he knows he cannot solve and so at soul level he keeps his distance. And privately, secretly, he turns to the imitation. What makes pornography so addictive is that more than anything else in a lost man's life, it makes him *feel* like a man without ever requiring a thing of him. The less a guy feels like a real man in the presence of a real woman, the more vulnerable he is to porn.

Pornography provides false fulfillment when what men really hunger for is God, and pornography provides false manhood to men who are starving to be masculine. If a woman, or lots of women, are willing to get naked just for *you*, you must be a man! Of course it's not really just for you, says Eldredge, but it feels that way when you're alone with the pictures.

To gain freedom from the pornography trap, it's not enough just to feel guilty or want to change. It's not enough to burn your magazines, shut down access to bad channels on your cable TV or satellite dish, or get an internet filter. Such things are necessary but not sufficient. Greater freedom comes with greater fulfillment: Your craving for the eternal must be filled fuller with God's Holy Spirit, and your craving for real manhood must be filled fuller by living your God-given masculine identity. I'll say more about this near the end of the program, but now let's consider some other things that must not be overlooked.

### **The Lion's Den**

First, something so basic it should hardly need saying: recognize that pornography is bad. It's not enough to know that porn is bad, but it's a starting point. You'll never escape from a trap if you think it's not a trap at all but a haven of happiness and pleasure.

Dick Smothers Jr., son of the comedian of Smothers Brothers fame, says he's proud of producing and acting in porn movies. He says he wants to be the Orson Welles of porn. Orson Welles was a creative genius in radio and film, not a sleaze merchant, but Dick Smothers Jr. speaks of porn as a legitimate business and an art form. If you take that same attitude and see nothing wrong with porn, you won't escape the pornography trap.

I often have to drive on a highway that has a billboard for an "adult superstore," a porn place that calls itself *The Lion's Den*. I wonder if the store name is making fun of the Bible's warning, "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Maybe somebody thought it was clever to name a porn palace *The Lion's Den*—but that's exactly what it is: A place for Satan to swallow souls. Porn is evil. Regardless of how many people look at it, regardless of how many respected businesses are marketing it, porn is evil. Perhaps the biggest profiteer from porn is not a place called *The Lion's Den* but a corporation called General Motors. Maybe you thought the world's biggest company simply marketed cars and trucks, but General Motors also markets huge amounts of porn through its subsidiary, DirectTV. *The New York Times* reported that General Motors "sells more graphic sex films every year than does Larry Flynt, owner of the Hustler empire." Communications giants AT&T, NewsCorp, and AOL Time Warner make more profit peddling porn than *Playboy* does. Hotels and motels owned by Hilton, Marriot, and other famous names are into pornography big time. The fact that mainstream corporations peddle porn might seem to make it respectable and acceptable, but it's not. It's evil.

Why is it evil? Pornography violates God's will and goes against the teaching of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Jesus then warned that we must get rid of whatever causes such sin or we could end up in hell. Pornography offends God, puts men in danger of hell, and seriously harms women.

It harms the women who are featured in the material, of course. Some are desperate, and the producers exploit them. Other women are willing and do evil for money, but they are selling their souls.

Pornography also does horrible damage to girls and women who are raped by men who want to act out what they've seen in porn. Don't think it doesn't happen. It's more frequent than any of the porn merchants want to admit. Pornography inflames some men to commit terrible crimes against women.

Probably the most common way pornography harms women is simply the damage it does to relationships. Many boys and men are trapped by airbrushed images and can't relate well to the real women they know. Dr. Gary Brooks calls it "The Centerfold Syndrome." A man gets into the habit of staring at bodies, not developing a relationship. How does a wife feel when her husband has been looking at pornography? She feels wounded and distanced from him. As one wife put it, "How can I compete with hundreds of anonymous others who are now in our bed, in his head? Our bed is crowded with strangers, where once we were intimate."

Pornography is sinful and harmful. Don't think for a moment that it's not. The Bible says, "Do not lust in your heart after her beauty... Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned" (Proverbs 6:25,27). If you use porn, you will get burned, and if there is no repentance, you will end up burning forever in hell. Don't play with fire. Don't settle down in the lion's den. If you're already trapped, don't try to relax and feel comfortable. Watch and pray for a way out.

### **Resisting Temptation**

Once you recognize that pornography is evil and harmful, make it your goal to stay away from it. Will power alone can't overcome an attachment to porn. You need power from God and fulfillment in him. But before God gives you that power, your will must be aiming at God's will

Job was one of the Bible's great men of faith who took God seriously and shunned evil. Job said, "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl" (Job 31:1). Have you made a covenant with your eyes, a serious commitment to see women not as things but as persons? The Bible says, "Treat ... younger women as sisters, with absolute purity" (1 Timothy 5:2). How would you treat a sister? Would you want your sister posing in porn magazines or performing in sex videos? Would you want millions of men staring at your sister's nakedness? Would you want big corporations profiting from her shame? If not, then don't treat any women that way by using pornography. See women as sisters, as children of the same heavenly Father, and not simply as toys for you to play with. Make a covenant with your eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.

How should you deal with sexual temptation? First of all, stay as far from it as you possibly can. The Bible doesn't say, "Get close to tempting situations and prove how strong you are by resisting as well as you can." The Bible says bluntly, "Flee from sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18). Flee! Run away! Get as far from it as possible. Stay out of stores that sell porn. Stay away from stores that rent sex videos. Don't subscribe to any TV package with filthy shows. Avoid motel rooms that offer "adult" material on the television. Scripture warns a young man about a tempting woman: "Her steps lead straight to the grave... Keep to a path far from her" (Proverbs 5:8).

I've been speaking mostly to men because pornography is mainly a male temptation. Pornographic scenes that turn men on will often disgust women. Women aren't nearly as likely to become addicted to dirty pictures and films. Still, women should be careful about emotional porn: romance novels and chick flicks, movie romances that make immorality seem exciting and heart-stirring. Women should also beware of internet chat rooms where they can find fantasy love affairs with strangers. This kind of chat is immoral, and too many of these fantasy internet affairs are turning into flesh-and-blood affairs. So although I'm talking mainly to men, I do want women to beware of emotional porn and its impact.

The first level of dealing with temptation is to avoid it as much as possible. But what if it can't be avoided totally? Even if you keep your home free from access to any pornographic material, it's almost impossible never to drive past any billboard advertising "gentleman's clubs." It's almost impossible to completely avoid all streets, stores, malls, and airports that have magazine stands with porn. And if you travel much, it's hard to avoid staying in motels where temptation is as close as the TV remote. Even when you avoid temptation as much as possible, you will have to face it at some point, especially in a sex-saturated culture, such as ours.

When temptation can't be avoided and comes very close, what can you do? Well, be on the lookout for the best way out of it. Don't look for a way to go further in; watch for the surest way to escape. The Bible promises followers of Jesus, "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

If you're driving and see a billboard for an adult store, don't slow down—keep driving. If you see a magazine stand with bad material, force your feet to go in another direction immediately. If you're in a motel room with bad stuff, don't pick up the TV remote. Pick up the telephone and call someone, either your wife or, if you're single, someone who can encourage you and hold you accountable. Temptation grows stronger in secrecy; it wilts in the light. Many Christian men help each other by telling their struggles to each other and by helping each other to be honest and to keep seeking purity.

### **Trapped by True Love**

Another major strategy for freedom from the porn trap is to be trapped by true love. In Proverbs 5, the Bible warns against sexual sin and then says, "May you rejoice in the wife of your youth... may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love" (Proverbs 5:18-19). God designed sex to flourish in faithful, passionate marriage, and if you are captivated by your wife's love, you're less likely to be trapped by pornography. So if you're not married and have strong sexual desires, pray that for greater self-control or for a spouse to love and share your passion. Scripture says, "It is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Corinthians 7:9).

Marriage has huge spiritual importance as a union of two people designed to dramatize the union of Christ and his church, but marriage also has the matter-of-fact, down-to-earth value of channeling sexual energy in a way that's healthy, not harmful. Scripture says, "Since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2). If you are married, do all you can to make the marriage stronger and warmer—and don't neglect lovemaking. The Bible is refreshing blunt about this: "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his

wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to herself alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to himself alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other... so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Corinthians 7:4-5).

In some relationships, sex is used as a bargaining chip, as something to be withheld unless your spouse goes along with your wishes on some matter. That's a huge mistake. If you treat your body as a bargaining chip, your spouse may start seeing it as an object as well and may be more tempted to seek out other objects that are more willing—those who pose for him in pornography. Does this mean that if a man falls into the pornography trap, his wife is to blame? Absolutely not. A man is always responsible for his own actions, even in situations where his wife might be cold or manipulative. In many cases, the wife is wonderful—a lovely person and a passionate lover—but the husband still somehow got himself into the pornography trap. The last thing such a woman should do is blame herself for not being woman enough to satisfy her husband. No woman is woman enough to satisfy a man once he walks into the pornography trap and activates all sorts of depraved lusts. He must get out of the trap and get back on track with God and his wife before he can find sexual satisfaction in the embrace of his wife.

Singles with strong sexual passions should seek and pray for someone to marry, and married couples should enjoy each other's bodies passionately and frequently—that's part of biblical wisdom and common sense for handling God-given sexual desires. But if you're already in the pornography trap, don't assume a good marriage will fix it. If you're single and have a porn habit, don't assume you'll be able to kick the habit simply by getting married and having a real woman. While you're still unmarried, before you have a wife, face your problem and fight it. Otherwise, you're likely to carry the pornography habit into the marriage, and you'll hurt your wife, yourself, and your relationship. Married men who have a porn habit shouldn't try to say that their habit would vanish if only their wife was nicer and sexier. If you have a porn problem, don't make it someone else's problem. Take responsibility for your own actions and character. Seek to change what's wrong with you, not what might be wrong with someone else. Bring your problem to God, ask for forgiveness and help, and become accountable to someone else.

### **Filling the Emptiness**

Having said all that, let's get back to where we started. When a man looks at pornography, he is really looking for God. He is trying to satisfy an emptiness that only God can fill. So don't settle for trying to remove pornography from your life. You don't just need less pornography; you need more of the grace of God and the Spirit of God.

If you have not been born again and don't belong to Jesus, you must be born again into a living relationship with the Lord. Pornography may be a sin, but it's not your most serious sin. Your most serious sin is unbelief: turning from God and choosing to live without him. Repent. Confess your rebellion. Ask God to forgive you for Jesus' sake, and trust that he will do so. His blood can cover your sin, and his Spirit can put the God-life inside you, transforming you into a new person.

If you're already a born-again, committed Christian, keep growing in God's grace and in having more and more of your heart and life filled by the Holy Spirit. Just because you're a genuine Christian doesn't mean you'll never be tempted. Just

because you're a real Christian doesn't mean you'll never sin. You fight temptation more effectively, and you'll sin less frequently than you did without Christ, but you are still far from perfect in this life. Be realistic about that, but don't let it discourage you. The Bible says, "Though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again" (Proverbs 24:16). Even if you still sin, it is spiritual growth to hate sin rather than love it, to fight it rather than wallow in it.

Pray for God to fill you with more of his living water and to keep you from trying to satisfy your deepest thirst with pornography or any other idol. Spend time with the Lord each day in prayer and Bible reading. Worship with other Christians every week in church, and if you need special help, find an accountability partner to encourage you and help you stay on track. None of this is a magic cure for pornography, but these things will help you get closer to God. The more you seek the Lord and the closer you get to him, the more he will fill your heart and the less room there will be for pornography.

Trust God's grace to pardon you and liberate you, and live in dependence on the Holy Spirit's power. Take to heart God's Word: "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:12). "Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Galatians 5:16).

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